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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how most students are not yet competent critical readers of academic or electronic texts. This is especially true of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students. After describing the extent of the lack of critical reading skills, an extensive literature review on the subject is provided. A description of how to teach critical reading skills to students follows. One strategy is to require students to read their assigned textbook chapter twice--first for understanding, second for evaluating. They are then required to annotate (write their notes and comments in the margin) the chapter. Next, students select some of their annotations to elaborate on, writing down the author's exact words together with their reactions, responses, comments and questions. Textbooks are a good choice for annotation for two reasons: they get the students to do their reading assignment in the textbook, and, because of their logical and methodical style, lend themselves easily to annotation. Annotation also helps to keep students interested and motivated to do well in class. (Contains 35 references.) (KFT)

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# HELPING ESL and EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS READ CRITICALLY: A 2000'S CHALLENGE

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# HELPING ESL and EFL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS READ CRITICALLY: A 2000'S CHALLENGE

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Recently Estonian and Finn teachers held a joint conference whose theme was "Overcoming Students' Reading Difficulties." According to Janet Richards (1999) ,this conference focused on reading and writing for critical thinking project described in the International Reading Association (IRA) newsletter, Reading Today. Teaching students to think, read and write critically is one of the 2000's challenges. University students who speak English as a second language or as a foreign language can learn to critically read print, visual, and electronic texts by using certain strategies. Many students, perhaps most students, come to universities without prior schooling opportunities and experiences that encourage or require critical thinking and critical reading. This lack of opportunity, I believe, occurs worldwide. Yet because of our technology-oriented age today, workplaces and universities everywhere expect and demand workers and students who are proficient in critical thinking and reading skills as well as in the skills of identifying and solving problems. More and more, employers struggling in a competitive world economy report that they are handicapped by new employees who can't understand instructions, who can't select or apply criteria to evaluate the best solution for even simple problems, or who can't even ask intelligent questions.

And even though in the U. S. the College Board of the Educational Testing Service (the TOEFL developers) has been telling educators since the 1980s that a successful university experience for students requires that they have critical thinking and reading skills, most students today are not yet competent critical readers of academic and electronic texts. This is especially

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true of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students. I certainly found this to be true in 1991 and 1995 when I taught English to university students in Malaysia. It is also true today when I teach ESL students in the required freshman writing courses where I teach. So, what can we as educators and researchers do about this complex critical reading problem? Well, there are no simple solutions, as we all know. But after struggling for many years as a secondary teacher and university professor to help my students (typical American students, as well as basic readers and writers and ESL/EFL students) become better critical readers (and writers). I have discovered a few techniques that seem to work. But first some background information about critical thinking, reading, and writing.

## A Review of the Critical Thinking Literature

Most approaches to enhancing critical thinking through reading and writing are rooted in philosophy. At the heart of the philosophical perspectives of thinking is the use of reason to guide behavior with formal logic traced to Aristotle and Plato and informal logic, the type used in recent approaches, traced to Toulamin and his colleagues (1981). The informal logic approach is easily seen in the materials developed by Lipman (1985) and Ennis (1985; 1987) as well as others since the 1950s as seen in Table ____. But as Marzano (1991) has pointed out, critical thinking is now using psychological approaches as well as philosophical ones. The psychological approaches view the human mind as a working mechanism with underlying operations that can be studied from cognitive psychological perspectives that include metacognition, componential (specific cognitive strategies such as summarizing, comparing, analyzing, questioning and developing visuals) and heuristics (the more general cognitive

strategies such as problem-solving and decision-making). Another approach to teaching critical thinking is a dispositional approach, described by Marzano as habits of thought, cognitive mental sets for specific situations such as realizing a sense of doubt, identifying goals, searching for evidence, revising one's plans when appropriate, looking for alternatives, seeing others' points of view. Reinforcing these dispositions/habits of "good thinking" are not easy and require discussion and teacher model. Added to these philosophical and psychological approaches are the socially-based approaches to teaching critical thinking, reading, and writing, exemplified by Heath and discussed earlier. A social approach includes learning to think critically by using family, community, classroom peers in collaborative learning and reinforcing situations.

Because of all these various approaches to teaching, critical thinking is now defined more broadly. Ennis (1987) suggests that "critical thinking is reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do." The National Council for Teachers of English defines it as a process which stresses an attitude of suspended judgment, and which incorporates logical inquiry and problem solving and leads to an evaluative decision or action. And the ERIC Clearing House on Reading and Communication Skills defines it as a way to reasoning that combines a demand for adequate support for one's beliefs with an unwillingness to be persuaded unless the support is forthcoming.

Some postmodernist activists like Benesch (1993) define critical thinking somewhat differently than others. Rather than a set of logical operations and skills or cognitive skills, she sees it as a process of questioning the status quo and of challenging existing knowledge and the social order. Her view is that critical thinking is a search for the social, historical, and political roots of conventional knowledge and an orientation to transform learning and society. She and



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some other teachers of English as a Second Language students have defined critical thinking as a democratic learning process examining power relations and social inequities. According to Benesch, in classrooms that feature critical thinking, students are encouraged to participate actively, raising issues of concern in their daily lives such as work, school, housing, and marriage as topics for scrutiny. She encourages ESL teachers to ask students to investigate their experience and its relationship to the language, politics, and the history of the new culture.

Feminists like Commeras (1993) define critical thinking as the thinking one does to challenge dominant patriarchal and hierarchal meaning systems. She favors a conception of thinking that embraces empathy, reason, and imagination because it provides an educational ideal that emphasizes the intimate connection between emotion and reason and challenges the mistaken perception that they are appositional. Situating critical thinking within a larger framework, such as post-formal thinking and critical postmodernism and its analysis of the failure of reason, she believes, holds greater promise for respecting the diversity in students' standpoints than does critical thinking alone.

But no matter how we define critical thinking, teachers at all levels in classrooms across the United States and around the world are being called on to use critical thinking approaches and to develop their students' critical thinking skills through reading and writing (Macfarlane, 1991).

Why do we need to teach critical thinking through reading and writing? In addition to the reasons cited earlier given by leaders in workplaces and by the College Board, a number of studies have shown that in everyday thinking, highly intelligent people often fall error to a variety of errors in logic (e.g. Perkins, Allen and Hafner, 1981). It is now more commonly assumed that

people have the ability to reason well but that they frequently don't--they misunderstand or forget premises and add unwarranted assumptions into their reasoning. The fact is that we do not always use good thinking habits and skills. Widespread concern about students' poor thinking skills has been expressed by educators, test makers, journalists, business leaders and the public at large.

As Flood and Lapp pointed out (1994), success at critical reading for some age groups has regressed in being able to answer analysis questions or to write analytical papers. This certainly has proved to be the case for students enrolled in writing, language, and literature classes in the English department where I teach. The National Assessment of Education Progress has reported that students show weaknesses in the logical processes required for clear communication. Employers complain that recent high school and university graduates have problems identifying problems, findings alternative and evaluative solutions and thinking creatively. I heard recently on a radio news program that Japanese business leaders are pleading with their government to include critical and creative thinking curricula into the nation's schools because they want to stop producing and imitating products developed in countries that encourage creative thinking and problem solving. The Japanese as well as the Malaysian economic leaders see the need to meet the coming challenges in the 2000s by teaching and nurturing critical and creative skills and behaviors. These economic leaders, like forward-thinking educators, want to better prepare students for the new century ahead.

Another reason to encourage critical thinking is the problem of the authoritative power over students by textbook publishers and authors as well as by much material on the internet. To counteract this power students mush acquire their own empowerment through critical reading.

But the most important reason for teachers to help students think, read, and write critically is that a democratic government requires citizens with these three skills not only to recognize and resist the claims of interest groups (for example, the advertisements and scams bombarding citizens today) but also the claims of politicians especially at election time. More and more of these claims of interest groups and politicians appear in English--in all types of media (print and non-print texts), and in all types of countries--in developed, developing, and underdeveloped countries and in both democratic and non-democratic countries. For these reasons, teachers of English as a Foreign Language and English as a Second Language must become aware of what critical thinking involves and how to teach it effectively.

As Heath points out, students must have certain assumptions before they can demonstrate critical thinking skills. As children learn to use language and are socialized within their own family, community and culture through language, these underlying assumptions of critical thinking, then emerge (see Table 1). In brief, according to critical thinking programs, a student who is a critical thinker and a critical reader has these characteristics:

- an individualist
- a reflective skeptic
- a questioner
- a doubter
- an arguer
- an observing bystander

This critical stance of an individual is integrated with verbal display of knowledge. But not all cultures are conducive to producing students who are critical thinkers and critical readers.

Critical thinkers, Heath notes, emerge as a result of learning certain attitudes, language uses, and orientations toward social roles in early socialization practices. The students' culture "must value individualism and value combative, information-based rhetoric exchanged among individuals. The culture must accept attention by participants to something more than their own immediate and direct sensory experiences." The culture must value change.

Mainstream citizens in cultures such as ours in the United States view infants as individuals who have the right and obligation to voice their judgments against those of others, so long as they respect rules and roles in doing so. But only certain types of language socialization practices provide such values and habits, enculturating children to the beliefs and customs that are the foundations of schools' criteria for successful demonstration of critical thinking, reading, and writing. Ironically, Heath says, family and community, not schools, socialize children into thinking critically through spoken and written language. Opportunities to practice these skills in schools come most frequently in advanced academic classes or in extracurricular activities of schools.

The lack of opportunity to refine and apply critical thinking through reading and writing in undergraduate classes was confirmed in recent interviews with several professors of undergraduate and graduate courses at Indiana University, Bloomington. When I asked about critical thinking through reading and writing in their classes, I was told that it doesn't happen much until students are in graduate courses. The reason, I was told, is that most undergraduate professors prefer textbooks that are written authoritatively, factually, without author opinions or stances on controversial issues in the field. According to the professors that I interviewed, these kind of textbooks lend themselves to tests with "right answers", making assessment of their tests

easier. With authoritative textbooks as the basis for tests, they have no need to judge student answers that are not cut and dried and that are the result of critical thinking. And, of course, the standardized and criterion-referenced tests used on all levels of schooling do not lend themselves to critical thinking either.

These situations further encouraged me to teach students in my undergraduate classes how to read critically through annotating their textbooks and writing textbook journals as well as evaluating the written materials from the Internet and library that they use for their researched papers. I also require that my students critically read their classmates' early and almost final drafts of papers as they respond to the ideas, organization, style, and visuals.

Teachers know, too, as Heath further notes, that in the United States, the language socialization of mainstream children who receive constant reinforcement of critical thinking from family and community differs from those children from nonmainstream groups. Many such children carry marked ethnic, racial, and cultural identities that work against their learning the fundamentals of critical thinking and reading. Thus in my undergraduate writing and language classes in the United States and Malaysia, I have had students without these critical thinking skills--the urban and rural poor first generation university students, the students from other cultures, as well as the students from some fundamental religious groups.

Many cultures and institutions in other countries have orientations toward groups, not individuals. Some communities and cultures may value an argumentative stance; but only by males; some cultures may reinforce combative, individualistic, verbal performance but only for a restricted range of genres such as songs in which the singer casts his or her words into those of a character, who debates the adversary. We all know of minority groups who were only allowed to



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think, speak, or write critically as singers, poets, comedians, playwrights and so on. But many countries and cultures are now recognizing the need for critical thinking in the world of today. For instance, the Ministry of Education in Malaysia now has added critical thinking through reading and writing to its elementary and secondary school curricula (Hashim and Abas, 2000; Mustopha, 1999).

From a review of the literature on critical thinking through reading and writing, I turn now to what I do in my university writing classrooms for EFL and ESL students.

I am still learning how to teach critical thinking through reading, writing, and discussing effectively. Almost every year I try something new and modify my previous strategies. And it is not easy. It takes time and effort on my part and my students' part. Students often resist when we ask them to be student critics and to reconstruct and/or rearrange and modify their thinking, reading and writing habits, traditions, language, and values they bring with them to class. We often threaten their commonsense ways of thinking, talking, and acting in academic settings--so they resist, whether they are EFL, ESL, or basic reading/writing students (Willett, J. and Jeannot, 1993). Fortunately though, not all resist, and even those who do resist at first, can and usually do stop resisting by the end of the course.

Briefly, what I do is to require that students read their assigned textbook chapter twice--first for understanding and then for evaluating. As they read to evaluate, they are to first write annotations in the margins (margin notes) throughout the chapter, annotations about the author's ideas (the content) and the author's writing and text design choices and strategies. They are to connect what they read to other texts and to their own experiences by comparing, contrasting, asking questions, expressing their attitudes and emotions as well as their thoughts. Their next



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step is to write a textbook journal selecting some of their annotations to elaborate on, writing down the author's exact words or a paraphrase of them, together with their reactions and responses with their reasons for their comments and any questions they have. The journals are shared and discussed with and responded to in writing their fellow classmates. Then they are given to me to read and respond to in writing. Sometimes I read them to the class with my oral and written comments about strengths and weaknesses. At the end of the course the students reread their annotations and journals and select certain ones to use a data for a letter to the author, evaluating the textbook. The textbooks and journals are given to me as well as the letters the last day of class. I photocopy the annotations, the journals, and the evaluative letters and send the original letters and sometimes the journals to the textbook author and editor at the publishers.

So why do I use textbooks as one of the important texts to teach critical thinking skills? I have several reasons. First, the annotations and journals ensure that my students read the required textbook on writing principles and the required handbook for my classes. I do not spend much class time going over the textbook or the handbook since I use a workshop approach when I teach writing. Many of today's university students in the U.S. do not read their textbook for one reason or another--they are poor readers, slow readers, students who got by in high school without reading textbooks, perhaps students with heavy difficult university schedules, students who are working full-time (40 hours a week) or almost full-time, or students who are parents of several children, a time-demanding situation. And all these situations are true for some of our students.

Another reason I use textbooks is that they lend themselves to critical reading especially well. Students on all levels usually see textbooks as authorities, not to be questioned. Since

critical thinking or reading requires complex, higher level processing skills such as questioning and identifying author assumptions, biases, and values, students entering a university usually do not read critically and, in the words of Christine Haas, see textbooks as "written by nobody and everybody--as if the information embodied in them was beyond human composition and beyond human question" (1992, p.1). Textbooks for them are informative (rather than persuasive) sources, sources of unchanging truth, sources untouched by human values or perspectives.

David Olson was one of the first to state that textbooks have authority and that the centrality of textbooks to schooling derives from the authority of textbooks. He states: "They [textbooks] are taken as the authorized version of a society's valid knowledge. The students' responsibility is primarily to master this knowledge." (238). Olson notes that students do not feel that they have the right to disagree with the authorized texts but must master them and be prepared to define them because of the status difference between writer and student, and between teacher and student. He explains that the origin of the authority of the textbook is the result of the divorce of the speaker from his or her utterance:

> The language originates elsewhere than in the mind of the current speaker. It has a transcendent source, and hence it is above criticism. Recall that as long as the speech originates with the current speaker, his listener knows that it is just his interests, and that he may or may not have satisfied the preparatory conditions for making an assertion. Hence his utterances are open to criticism. When the same statement originates or appears to originate elsewhere, particularly if that source is sacred or has high status, it will be immune to or above criticism. Written texts, among other things, are devices which separate speech from speaker, and that

separation in itself makes the words impersonal, objective, and above criticism. (239)

Yet, as Luke, de Castell, and Luke argue (1989) in their chapter, "Beyond Criticism," the divorce of the speaker from his or her utterance only partially explains the origin of textbook authority, for textbooks derive at least part of their authority from being authorized by institutionally-bound administrative sources. ("Beyond Criticism" 254).

Extreme variations in students' learned conceptions of the nature, validity, and criticizibility of school knowledge result because teachers use textbooks differently depending on their social class and that of their students (Anson, cited in Luke, De Castell, and Luke, 1989) and, of course, also because of the teachers' and students' cultures and belief system about the world. However, most students regard what they read and hear in their classroom as true; because of this schooling, they view textbooks (and their teachers as extensions of textbooks) as truth givers. They have learned to expect typical textbooks and teacher talk to be presented objectively, impersonally, and without stance or voice. Presented with one flat assertion after another in their schooling, students learn to value certainty rather than contingency. And, in relation to both their textbook and their teachers, they assume the docile, acquiescent, non-authoritative status described by Luke, de Castell, and Luke.

This situation was certainly the case for my EFL students in Malaysia. They had never been asked to respond to a text (any text) either in secondary school or their university classes or to write evaluative annotations, textbook journals, and letters to the textbook author. Their earlier schooling experiences had not encouraged them to read and write about texts as student critics or to respond to texts emotionally and reflectively. This was a totally new experience for

them as it was for my ESL students in the United States and also for my non-ESL basic readers and writers and regular students who placed in the required introductory writing courses for freshmen or those enrolled in other writing courses at IPFW. By the end of the course, however, most students had learned to read their textbooks critically.

Of course, I ask students to transfer their critical reading and writing skills to textbooks in other classes and to texts used for research whether print, electronic or two dimensional texts. From their reflections it is clear that many do transfer these skills in nonacademic as well as academic settings.

In addition to my decision to use textbooks to teach critical thinking, reading and writing skills, I also decided to require students to annotate (write margin notes) in their textbook. Of course, annotations have been around for thousands of years. Jewish religious scholars annotated the Torah religious text and biblical scholars annotated the Bible. The same was true for the Koran and no doubt other religious texts. Annotations were even annotated. According to Duchastel (1985), annotations/margin notes are a distinct level of discourse. Their principal function is not so much to help the students process the main text as it is to serve as contents to be used in their own right. Annotations, thus, can best be characterized by their status as a distinct level of discourse within the textbook itself. Interestingly, Mayali (1991) agrees that the annotation is a procedure of political appropriation of the power and authority of the text; it is an apparatus for reproducing knowledge in a form that legitimates the annotator. He traces the gradual history of this appropriation of the main text by the annotator: first there were cross-references of the text or texts, next there were interlinear glosses (annotations that do not stand on their own outside the text), glosses that attempted to explain and/or interpret the text. In the

days of the Roman Empire Irish students learning Latin used the interlinear glosses to help them learn the Latin words. In the twelfth century interlinear and marginal commentaries were regrouped and circulated among readers without the annotated text. On the page, they took the place of the text. The annotator became an author: he was a source of knowledge, his opinions were discussed by other readers. The gradual annotation process thus ends with the recognition of both the authority of the annotations and the legitimacy of the annotator.

I see this legitimation played out in my writing classroom as students annotate their writing textbooks, and then at the end of the semester, quote them or photocopy them to include or attach to their evaluative letters to the author and the publisher's editor. My students are taken seriously as are their annotations by the textbook author and the publishers. They have gained power and authority as authors of legitimate texts, appropriations of the textbooks.

In my classroom, all students write annotations in their writing textbook. As my colleague, Dave McConiga, and I have noted (1993), the existing research on textbook annotations has focused on annotations inserted by others–by authors or publisher consultants--to facilitate comprehension and memory recall (e.g. Otto, 1981), rather than on annotations written by students themselves with the aim to evaluate and respond to the text. Research by Bretzing and Kulhang (1979) investigated student-developed annotations/margin notes. After students read a part of the text they then paraphrased or summarized it in annotations in the margins of the text. They found that paraphrasing main ideas or summarizing them did help students' retention. They argued in favor of student margin notes as a way to process the text more deeply and to assist in deeper analysis of the text. Students who read carefully, rather than only skimming the text and who took time to write the appropriate kind of margin notes benefitted in understanding,


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analyzing, and remembering. I tell them about these research findings to motivate them and persuade them, since I want my students to first understand and analyze the textbook in order to critique and respond, to connect to and to remember the author's content, the writing strategies and the text design,.

At the beginning of the semester, I give a brief overview of the course goals, explaining that critical reading is one of the course goals agreed on by our department's composition committee. Then I give them a handout on marginal annotations used to evaluate a text from Bazerman's textbook The Informed Writer (1995). Bazerman gives examples of critical reading annotations used for showing their for approval and disapproval, disagreements, any exceptions, counter-examples, or supporting examples, any extensions, discoveries, possible implications, personal associations, reading associations, or questions based on the content of the textbook. Bazerman explains the difference between annotating to clarify/understand and annotating to evaluate and react/respond to texts. He also explains scholarly annotations (footnotes). Besides the kinds of annotations discussed by Bazerman regarding the content of the textbook, I also ask students to evaluate the writing strategies and text design throughout the assigned textbook chapter. Besides the Bazerman handout, I give them photocopied examples of my former students' textbook annotations and ask students to form small groups and critique them. Several times throughout the semester I ask students to give me their textbooks so that I can assess the quality and quantity of their annotations. Their annotation grades are part of the final course grade.

Over the years I have found that the quality and quantity of the annotations help to identify motivated and not so motivated students and the above average, average, and below

average readers and writers in my classes. Sometimes due dates for students' other projects or tests in my class or their other classes negatively affect their annotations or their lack of interest in a chapter topic affects both quality and quantity of the annotations. But in general I find that students do increase their skills in annotating. And I find they have overcome their reluctance to write in their textbooks because they believe they can't resell their textbook or because their previous pre-university experiences with rented textbook policies that ingrained in them the law, "thou shalt not write in thy textbooks."

After the annotating step comes the textbook journal writing step, done either at home or in class. Reading journals, according to Corbett (1995), possibly had their rudimentary beginnings as annotations--the margin notes readers made in books as they read. Family Bibles and college textbooks are notable sources of margin notes in an informal study of margin notes in used books sold by the University of Illinois textbook store. Pearson (1983) found not surprisingly, that graduate students wrote more and longer margin notes than undergraduates. So far I have not read any published research reports that investigated the differences in length and quality of textbook journals written by graduates and undergraduates. I ask students to spend between 20 to 30 minutes on the textbook journal task. At first students take more time to write a textbook than later on when they have become more comfortable with their textbook journal writing. I prepare a journal entry form each semester for students to use writing their journals because I find it easier to use a standardized set of journals to respond to and react to. Sometimes I change the categories of response types I want them to write about, experimenting with various ones and identifying the ones that are the easiest and most difficult for them to use. I ask students in their journals, to talk back to their textbook author. They question (asking, for

instance, how effectively the textbook is talking to the reader), speculate, test hypotheses, make connections with what they already know from their own knowledge and personal experiences. Early in the semester I find most students agreeing with the author's ideas, strategies and text design more than disagreeing. After they've learned more about the writing in our course and begin to recognize the textbook author's patterns of organization and style, they tend to do more disagreeing about what the author said and did. They slowly realize that textbook authors don't always practice what he/she preaches in regard to writing to meet readers' needs and that there are omissions of content in the textbook needed for our class assignments or their own knowledge.

Students write a textbook journal for each assigned textbook chapter. I ask them to write (handwritten or word processed) about one and a half to one and three-fourths pages of journal writing (the front and back of the textbook journal form). When I read the journals I respond to their questions, comments about the textbook and their associations in and out of classrooms to the textbook. When I return their journals to them, they read my comments and then share their journals with several classmates--analyzing and comparing how their own journals were similar to and different from their classmates' in content and style. I then ask them to summarize orally or in writing what they learned from the textbook journal sharing. Thus, I try to enhance critical thinking skills through reading, writing and discussion. I make connections throughout the semester between their critical reading of the textbook and their peer critiques of polished drafts and final drafts of the five major out-of-class writing assignments as well as some in-class writings.

In addition, we thoroughly discuss the need for critically reading Internet and library

sources used for researched papers based on handouts and chapters in their handbook and textbook. In our writing textbook, Stephen Reid, the author, has a whole section on "Evaluating Internet Sources" in his chapter on research as well as passages about it in his chapter on evaluating (1998). Reid asks students to evaluate internet sources with a critical eye since they have not been screened by experts in the field for accuracy and reliability as have printed sources in the library. He points out the lack of any content cues for internet sources. He gives five criteria with examples of questions students should ask about authorship, publishing organization, reference to other sources, accuracy and reliability and currency. (See Figure ___)

In our handbook, the authors Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors (1999) focus on critical thinking using a framework for each chapter that helps students approach their own writing with a critical eye. They give students guidelines for revising drafts and editing for common errors along with end-of-chapter activities that ask them to think critically about issues in the chapter and to apply what they learn to their own writing. Figure ____ shows the guidelines for reasoning that Lunsford and Connors give students. In their chapter, "Thinking Critically: Constructing and Analyzing Arguments," they focus on questions that students should ask about others' ideas or about their own ideas, listing seven questions to ask authors, including themselves as author. See Figure ____ for this list. They end their subsection on thinking critically by saying that "the ultimate goal of all critical thinking is to construct your own ideas, to reach your own conclusions. These, too, you must question and assess." (p.71) Thus Lunsford and Connors go beyond evaluating others writing to include self-evaluation of students' own ideas, strategies, and text design in their writing.

Of course as Mlynacgyk (1998) discovered with her ESL students, teachers and students

find writing journals for critical and reflective thinking a struggle at times. Some students' journals open the way to reflection and response whereas others clearly do not. But the same is true for non-ESL/EFL students, too.

According to Short (1995), reading response journals have been studied by classroom teachers and university educators in order to identify the types of responses and comments that students write. Their results show that students write about (1) intextural connections to personal experiences and other texts; (2) their reading processes and reading strategies; (3) reflections on personal values and beliefs; (4) the author's writing style and strategies; (5) questions, confusions, predictions, and revisions of meaning. Journals serve as a tool for student self-evaluation and as a way for teachers to evaluate changes over time in students' understanding and ability to think, read, and write critically. Research has also indicated that reading journals create student interest in reading textbooks by removing the threat of wrong answers. Because these journals capture thinking in process and make thoughts visible for reflection and sharing, they deepen the level of response and encourage a reflective, spectator stance [as well as a questioning stance]. Through these journals, teaches have gained valuable insights into what students understand , how they think and learn, and how they approach reading [e. g. textbooks]. Corbett (1995) also notes that reading journals/responses are valuable as assessment tools because they provide authentic ways of evaluating student learning in critical reading and writing. Such assessments encourage interdisciplinary connections and intradisciplinary dependencies, as well as provide more relevancy and meaning in the instruction for teachers and students. See Figure ___ for a list of assessment questions teachers and students can use for textbook journals.

In addition to these textbook journal benefits for students and teachers, there are also

benefits for the textbook authors and publishers. Shriver (1996) writes, "We can think of our active engagement with the author as conversation, sometimes playful, while other times aggressive. On the other hand, when we have little or no background information on the topic, we are more likely to spend our attention trying to understand and connect what we have read with our prior knowledge rather than scrutinizing the author's claims" (or writing style and strategies). But when we are reading to evaluate text, our goal is to identify strengths as well as weaknesses and to then find solutions for the weaknesses. Reading to evaluate can be viewed as a cognitive process (and an emotional process) which is "built on top" of the comprehension process but with the added goals of comprehending and criticizing the text from the point of view of its effectiveness for its intended audience. Thus, when reading to evaluate, the reader consciously looks for problematic text features and attempts to discover alternative solutions. The critical reader must ask, 'Is this the most rhetorically effective way to present these ideas to the intended audience?' (p. 10)

The intended audience for university textbooks is university students, of course, but the authors may intend the textbook to be used by specific students at specific types of higher education institutions– for instance, research universities with residential buildings for traditional students just out of secondary school; urban universities with many non-traditional, older commuting students with full-time jobs and families and without residential buildings; two year institutions for general education, remedial, or technical vocational training, again with many non-traditional students but without residential buildings. With different textbook audiences, there are different responses by students as to what the textbook problems are and what the suggestions are for improving the textbook. The possible audiences for university textbooks also

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include all those students for whom English is not their first language.

The final step in helping students learn to think critically through reading and writing is asking students to write an evaluative letter to the textbook author as part of their final exam. in In our writing course students' first major writing assignment is to write a letter to an appropriate reader(s), evaluating a brand name product (e.g. a ballpoint pen, a back pack, roller blade skates, an electric mixer). Their evaluation compares the brand name product to an ideal product based on three to four criteria that they select. They rate/judge the brand name product for how well it measures up to their criteria overall and for each criterion. They support their rating claims with evidence based on their own personal experiences as a user of the product. Students use the criteria sheet I have designed for this project (see Figure ___) as well as the chapter on evaluating in Reid's textbook. Their final exam is an evaluative letter to the textbook author (in this case, Reid) and thus is a review of their first evaluation letter project. To support their rating claims for each criterion, students reread and refer to their textbook annotations, and to their textbook journals, quoting, paraphrasing or summarizing what they wrote earlier.

I expect them to use the process approach: writing several drafts, getting a peer response to their polished draft and giving me their out-of-class error-free final draft. I read and evaluate their final drafts based on whether they have followed my criteria, whether it is persuasive enough and whether it is error-free (or almost error-free). In their letters students include their mailing and email addresses. I also write a letter, explaining the project to the author and publisher and express the hope that the student feedback can help improve the next edition of the textbook. I then send all the letters to the author and a copy of each to the publisher's editor for that textbook. I also make a copy of each letter for me to use for later teaching and research

purposes.

What my students have done is to use what Shriver calls a reader-focused text evaluation method, a method relying on feedback from the intended audience. In this textbook critical reading project there is a concurrent text evaluation part which is based on the real-time responses or problems encountered by readers as they read--and the possible solutions they identify--and a retrospective part which is based on readers' reflections. Some researchers according to Shriver (1996) use text evaluations in non-academic settings. These text evaluations consist of surveys, interviews, focus groups, critical incidents and reader feedback cards. My classroom method goes beyond brief reader feedback. Letters allow for more evidence of students' critical thinking and evaluation to be used by me and their letters also allow more elaborate feedback for the textbook author and publishers who then can more easily see what students found problematic. They can especially the better understand the verbal, print, and visual omissions that bothered student readers as well as the writing style, strategies, and text design features that worked and didn't work for them. Of course, textbook authors and publishers must consider the costs and benefits of making changes for future revisions and for new textbooks based on student feedback about the global and local levels of the textbook.

Interestingly, textbook authors and publishers often respond to individual students in letters or email messages and often respond to me in letters about them, saying that the student letters (and textbook journals I often include) have helped the authors to become better writers and publisher's editors to become better editors. These benefits are in addition to the critical thinking, reading and writing benefits for the students, and the satisfaction I gain from seeing the growth of my students' skills and improved writing textbooks for us to use.

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